

Wild Snapper Action Cabo Style

By John Afishinado King

I am certain that there is nothing more exciting than fishing for Snapper, Cabo Style. I know this is a bold statement, but I have been around awhile and I have caught them all; 200+ pound tuna in stand up gear from my own boat, Dorado to 60 pounds, giant 100+ pound Broomtail Grouper, Black and Blue Marlin to 600 pounds, sailfish in wide open bites, Yellowtail in massive foamers, White Sea Bass large enough to outrun seals while on the hook, Peacock Bass in a Volcanic Lake and numerous marlin, including a 198 pound striper that took the 2005 Catalina Classic. I enjoy fishing and all of these fish give me a thrill. Just so you know where I am coming from, here are my top five fishing experiences:

1. Catching snapper to 14 pounds in the surf line from my own boat.
2. Hand holding the live bait line and feeling a big blue marlin inhale my Skippy.
3. Running the teaser line when baiting and switching sailfish.
4. Watching a huge, hooked Swordfish doing “fly-bys” off the transom.
5. Grabbing the bill of a marlin and feeling the kick of a freshly revived fish.

I realized when writing this that I should have expanded my list to the top ten, because I had to leave out so many exciting moments in fishing such as the strike of a big Calico, the anxious fight of a big Salmon, the first run of a White Sea Bass and the desperate pull of a mean, deepwater Ling. Still, at the top of the list for me is the lowly Snapper. I know you are immediately questioning my sanity. “What’s this guy talking about?” you are asking, “snapper is a bottom fish, and there is no way a bottom fish can match the thrill of catching a pelagic.” Hold on Chachi, let me explain.

I make it to Cabo at least three times a year. In the spring when the North winds have quieted down I make the run in my boat from Cabo into the Sea of Cortez to fish the East Cape and sometimes to fish La Paz. In the Fall I am fully engaged in tournament fishing for marlin and money so the boat is loaded up with 130 pound gear, tuna tubes and big gaffs. But in the winter, usually in late January or early February, I add a few days to my visit so that I can take some time and target the big Snapper that haunt the coastlines and shallow rocky reefs of the peninsula. This last trip put us right in the middle of the hottest Snapper bite I have ever seen.



We had fished for two days in the King Harbor Marlin Tournament and were lucky to win both the Top Gun for our angler Maureen MacInnes and the overall Top Boat in the tournament. A great way to start the '06 season. My guests had all made flight arrangements to leave on Sunday. My flight was not until Wednesday, so I had a couple of days to get off the wheel and catch some fish. We had seen big Tuna puddling off the southern tip of the Golden Gate bank during our marlin tournament. We even had a big one come up to sniff the boat while we were hooked up, but we could not get a bite from these fish. Still, you have to try, and so we went offshore the first day to see if we could get into some sushi action. The waters looked good; we caught a nice marlin, but no tuna. It was getting late in the day when I looked up to the bridge and yelled to Javi, "Let's go find some Snapper for dinner!" It did not take long to get the gear stowed and start a full speed run to the beach.

The trick to Snapper fishing is finding the rocks that are holding the fish. We pulled in very close to the beach and began trolling some Rapallas around the rocky sections of the shoreline just outside the surf line. We came into a zone that was holding a good number of large Sierra; this is a good sign for Snapper. These fish key in on the same baits and they hunt in similar ways. After hooking and releasing a few of these toothy speedsters we spotted a promising looking rock. Not a bunch of rocks, but a lone soldier that barely showed below the surface. We were lucky to have some live mackerel that we had made at the Golden Gate earlier in the day. I nose-hooked a nice mac and gave Javi the nod that I was ready. This is where it gets tricky and wild. The surf on the Pacific side is always up in the afternoon, so you need to time the swells, back the boat toward the rock

and get your cast on the beach side of the boiler while the captain is moving back to deeper water and out of the surf line. If you have made a good cast you free spool to allow your bait to swim in search of shelter in the foaming churn of the surf break.



There is something magical about planning a move and executing it well enough to get bit on the first cast. Something like a yelp comes involuntarily out of your mouth as you purge those wonderful words, “I’m bit!” The Snapper picks up the bait on the full gallop and is immediately heading back behind the rock for its own protection. Sometimes you just get lucky, often times you do not, but to catch Snapper in these conditions with any consistency you have to be ready to get into gear and get the fish moving toward the boat in a hurry. If you can turn their head and pull hard enough, you will be rewarding with a beautiful fish and a great fish. We boated a 14 pound Snapper on our first cast. We caught two more on different rocks along the same shoreline before the swell built and the conditions deteriorated. On the way in Javi and I agreed to return for another round the next day.

I swear I did not tell a soul in Cabo about the bite, but the next day we found a number of boats working the shoreline. We tried a few spots and watched to see if any of the other boats were hooking up. After about an hour we decided that the bite might be better later in the day. We trolled for tuna and marlin, but we were really just biding out time to return to our spot and see if we could get the bite going. By three in the afternoon we were back and in position for the first cast. It was a repeat of the previous day. Javi back

down, I pitched the bait behind a rock and a beautiful Snapper almost pulled me out of the boat. This proved to be a forecast of things to come.

We were in the bite and moving up and down the beach, repositioning with the current and swell. The bite was going strong with a good mix of Sierra and Snapper. All of a sudden another boat moves in on our fun. In Mexico this is not the same sin that it is in the States. It is very common to share a tight bite with other boats. I have had other Captains pull back to allow my jumping Marlin to clear their bow. I have had a Dorado that was hooked by two different anglers on two different boats. So, it was not a problem that was going to change our strategy.

We literally said hi to the other boat and let them know what was working. In the midst of this a Snapper popped up behind the rock closer to the other boat and we simultaneously yelled "Right there!" The deckhand and Captain were not totally in synch on this fish, as the deckie made an overly strong cast while the Captain was pulling out of the incoming swell. The boat lifted over the swell and in an instant the deckie had been popped out of the boat. There was nothing the Captain could do but pull away as the deckie held the rod high trying to keep it. At that moment the rod tip bent in the direction of the Snapper and literally began pulling the deckie toward the rocks, "He's bit!" I yelled, "He's bit!" This was not looking too good for the deckie. Alertly he backed off the drag and began struggling with a one-handed swim out of the surf line. The Captain pulled back and the other deckie tossed a line. Miraculously, the line found the soggy deckie and he was able to take a wrap and be pulled out of the surf. As he handed up the rod to the charter customer I suggested, "You better catch that fish!" Sure enough, the fish was still on. They got both the deckie and the fish on board and pulled back into the zone for another shot. Snapper fishing will do that to you; try it the next time you are in Cabo.

Captain John runs Afishinado Charters out of Avalon Harbor on Catalina Island. He can be reached through his web site, www.afishinados.com.